

JUNETEENTH DAY

Mr. KOHL. Mr. President, I rise to recognize Juneteenth Day, a yearly commemoration of the abolition of slavery in our country.

As a nation we value and appreciate the freedom and independence Juneteenth Day represents. Historically, Juneteenth Day has been a celebration of our country's rich African-American heritage and has promoted awareness about the history of African American sacrifice.

A great celebration took place on June 19, 1865, when slavery was finally abolished 2 years after the Emancipation Proclamation. Fishing, festivals, barbecuing and baseball are just a few of the typical Juneteenth activities people enjoy today. Juneteenth has long been a day of education and enlightenment and often includes guest speakers and prayer services.

I believe that observing Juneteenth Day is necessary to truly embrace the equality and freedom our country represents. We live in a culturally diverse nation and celebrations like Juneteenth Day encourage us to understand and respect the differences that make our country great.

It is imperative that we continue the work of achieving racial and ethnic harmony and I am honored to acknowledge this important day. I commend the tremendous dedication of the people who participate in the annual Juneteenth Day celebrations.

HEAD START FOR SCHOOL READINESS ACT

Mr. ENZI. Mr. President, I rise today in support of the Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007. This legislation is a bipartisan effort by the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee to reauthorize the Head Start Act.

The Head Start Program was established in 1965 as part of the war on poverty by President Lyndon B. Johnson. The purpose of the program was, and remains, to provide educational and other developmental services to children in very low-income families. Since its creation, Head Start has been a comprehensive early childhood development program that provides educational, health, nutritional, social, and other services to low-income preschool-aged children and their families. Head Start currently provides services to over 900,000 children and their families through a network of over 1,600 public and private agencies.

The legislation before us today builds on work started last Congress by the HELP Committee under my leadership. The Head Start for School Readiness Act ensures that low-income children receive the educational and developmental services they need to be ready to learn and be successful in school.

I want to thank Senator KENNEDY for his ongoing commitment to working on a bipartisan basis, which has resulted

in legislation that meets the needs of children and families who participate in the Head Start Program throughout our Nation. I would also like to thank our colleagues, Senators ALEXANDER and DODD, for their fine work and dedication to this important program.

Head Start was created to level the playing field for low-income children by providing them with education and development activities. This program recognizes that children do not start school with the same set of experiences and knowledge and helps provide low-income children with some of the experiences and knowledge their more affluent peers have as they start their elementary school experience. The Head Start Program also recognizes the important role that families play in a child's development and encourages their regular participation in the program.

This legislation helps ensure that children in the Head Start Program will be better prepared to enter school with the skills necessary to succeed. It is well documented in early childhood education research that students who are not reading at grade level by the third grade will struggle with reading the rest of their lives. Head Start provides early education for over 900,000 children each year, most of whom would not have the opportunity to attend preschool programs elsewhere. The future of these children is why we have all worked so hard to improve and strengthen this act. The legislation before us today will help Head Start Programs provide children with the early learning skills and early childhood development activities they need to be successful. Head Start introduces many of these children to books, the alphabet, numbers, as well as how to play and share with their classmates. Head Start provides the building blocks children need for success later in life.

The Head Start for School Readiness Act builds on what many great Head Start providers are already doing. Working from recommendations from the National Academy of Sciences, this bill adds educational standards related to language skills, literacy and numeracy skills, as well as cognitive, emotional, and physical development. Steps are also taken to ensure that limited English proficient children are provided assistance in acquiring the English language.

I am particularly pleased with the accountability provisions put forth in this legislation. The legislation before us today includes important changes to the Head Start Program related to the evaluation and review of grantees. The timeframe for Head Start grantees to appeal decisions made by the Secretary to terminate grants is now limited. In some instances, Head Start grantees have been found to be operating programs that are unsafe or misusing Federal funds—and are often continuing those bad practices for months—as long as 600 days in some cases—during the termination process. This equates

to children not receiving quality services, and instead of being prepared for success, they fall further behind.

Additional steps have been taken in this legislation to increase the quality of Head Start Programs, including providing the Secretary the authority to terminate a grantee that has multiple and recurring deficiencies that has not made significant and substantial progress toward correcting those deficiencies. This legislation provides greater clarity for grantees as to what constitutes a program deficiency. Many of us have heard from grantees across the country who expressed frustration with the lack of consistency with which the provisions of the Head Start Program is enforced. For that reason this legislation includes provisions related to interrater reliability—this will help ensure consistency in the review of Head Start Programs across the country.

Changes were made to the distribution of grant funds to ensure that programs maintain their funded levels of enrollment. We understand that families served by the Head Start Program tend to be more migratory and that full enrollment at Centers is often difficult to maintain. However, we also know that many programs have waiting lists and that thousands of eligible children are not currently being served. This legislation balances those needs by providing flexibility in meeting full enrollment, but also requiring funds to be moved from chronically under-enrolled programs.

Senator DODD has provided valuable leadership as we worked to develop a clear policy on the roles and responsibilities of the governing bodies and policy councils. We have worked together to clarify and strengthen the roles of the governing body and policy councils while preserving the important role of parents. After careful review, the committee found that many of the important fiscal and legal responsibilities of Head Start grantees were not explicitly assigned.

Unfortunately there have been too many examples of programs that have failed the children, families, and community they were funded to serve due to appalling financial mismanagement. Cases were brought to the committee that detailed excessive and inappropriate expenditures, lost funds, and reduced services to children because proper financial management techniques were not in place. Too often the truth was hidden from governing bodies and policy councils alike.

The bill clarifies those responsibilities leading to more consistent, high-quality fiscal and legal management, which will ensure these programs are serving children in the best possible way. Changes in this legislation address the concerning situations mentioned earlier by placing fiscal responsibility with the governing body. It is absolutely necessary and vital that one entity maintain fiscal and legal control of the Federal grant dollars. That